

WILLIAM PATRICK

By the Grace of God and



the Favor of the Apostolic See

BISHOP OF LA CROSSE

**DECREE**

**On the Dispensation from the Obligation of Sunday Mass during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Peace be with you my friends.

This is a scary and unsure time for many of us but as we heard in this morning's first reading from the prophet Jeremiah "Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord." These words are hard for us to hear and even harder for us to live particularly in times that are filled with fear and the unknown. We all like to be in control and when we are not we all too often try all the harder to regain control. Today with the pandemic of COVID-19 we are in a place of uncertainty and fear seeing the suffering and toll on human life around the world as well as right here in our country. We so much desire to regain control that we often forget that our trust needs to be in our Lord that our hope is in the Lord. I invite you in this time of uncertainty and fear to turn to the Lord in prayer asking that He take charge and we place ourselves at His service. It will not be our strength, but His, that will win the day.

Liturgical prayer, particularly the Eucharist, the Source and Summit of our faith, is essential for all believers. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life. 'Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church'(CCC 2177)"

In no way do I want to diminish the importance of the Sunday Eucharistic celebration and its importance in the life of the Church nor the trust we need in our Lord, but the Lord also said "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"(Mark 2:27).

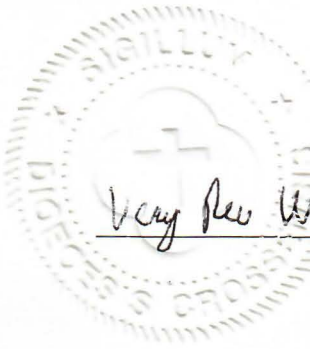
At this moment, with the spread of COVID-19 through our communities and world, it is appropriate holding to the importance of the central mystery of our faith to relax the obligation tied to this most sacred rite during this time of pandemic. This lifting of the obligation to attend Mass in no way reduces the command to keep Holy the Sabbath. There are many ways to accomplish this, but as the Code of Canon Law states, "If participation in the Eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or for another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful take part in a liturgy of the word if such a liturgy is celebrated in a parish church or other sacred place according to the prescripts of the diocesan bishop or that they devote themselves to prayer for a suitable time alone, as a family, or, as the occasion permits, in groups of families."(CIC can. 1248 §2)

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It is only appropriate that with many of our parishioners in the vulnerable categories for this virus and many others questioning their health or worried about the spread to a vulnerable adult they care for that we relax the obligation.

So, I Decree that the Sunday obligation to attend the Holy Mass is suspended until further notice. As of now Sunday services will still be held and those not in a vulnerable position are encouraged to attend and join your prayers to those who are absent. Those who are absent know that you are held spiritually close in heart and prayer and request your prayers in support of the community.

Given at the Office of the Bishop, Holy Cross Diocesan Center, at La Crosse this thirteenth day of March in the year of Our Lord 2020, the Second Friday of Lent.



SEAL

Very Rev William A. Dher

Chancellor

William Patrick Ballarín  
Bishop of La Crosse